Instructions for Completing the Farmland Conversion Rating Form

There are six portions of the Farmland Conversion Rating Form (Form NRCS-CPA-106). This attachment will provide an overview of who is responsible for completing each portion of the form, as well as instructions on completion on the individual portions of the form.

Prior to completion of Form NRCS-CPA-106, a map should be submitted with the Concept Statement, and should identify potential project impact areas. This map will be used to answer the questions on this form. The Iowa DOT Office of Location and Environment staff will use the map and overlay it with some or all of these resources:

- NRCS Soil Maps
- Census Bureau Maps
- USGS topographical maps
- USDA Important Farmland Maps
- Other resources that may be relevant to specific projects

I. Part I of the form should be completed by LPA's project engineer.

II. Part II will be completed by NRCS staff if Form NRCS-CPA-106 has a combined score of >160.

III. Part III should be completed by the LPA.

IV. Part IV will be completed by NRCS staff if Form NRCS-CPA-106 scores >60.

V. Part V will be completed by NRCS staff if Form NRCS-CPA-106 scores >60.

VI. Part VI will be completed by LPA project engineer with assistance from Iowa DOT NEPA Section Staff. A score should be generated for every reasonable alternative that is being considered. Each question is explained on the Form NRCS-CPA-106, as well as in more detail below.

Part VI, Question #1: Area in Nonurban Use: According to the following table, assign a point value for the percentage of land in nonurban use within a radius of one (1) mile of the project:

Percentage	>90	90	80	70	60	50	40	30	20	<20
Point Value	15	14	12	11	9	7	5	2	1	0

Part VI, Question #2: Perimeter in Nonurban Use: According to the following table, assign a point value for the percentage of the project site perimeter that borders land in nonurban use.

Percentage	>90	90	80	70	60	50	40	30	20	<20
Point Value	10	9	8	7	6	5	4	3	1	0

Part VI, Question #3: Percent of Corridor Being Farmed: According to the following table, assign a point value for the percentage of project corridor that has been farmed (managed for a scheduled harvest or timber activity) for more than five (5) of the last ten (10) years.

Percentage	>90	90	80	70	60	50	40	30	20	<20
Point Value	20	19	16	14	11	9	6	4	1	0

Part VI, Question #4: Protection Provided by State and Local Government: This question is used to determine whether the property in question is taxed at a different rate than other tax rates in the county. There are three different assessment rates: residential, commercial, and agricultural land. If the land in question is classified as agricultural, it is considered a differential assessment and would score 20 points. In this question, the parcels are either protected or not. If the property is not classified as agricultural, the score would be zero.

Part VI, Question #5: Size of Present Farm Unit Compared to Average: According to the following table, assign a point value for the average size of the farm unit(s) containing the site (before the project) as compared with the average size farm unit in that county.

Percentage	>=100	95	90	85	80	75	70	65	60	55	<50
Point Value	10	9	8	7	6	5	4	3	2	1	0

- First, go to the USDA's Census of Agriculture Iowa tables for Number of Farms, Land in Farms, and Average Farm Size, Iowa by County, 2012.
- Find the average farm size for the county in question.
- Determine the number of acres that will be converted for this project. This is the total number of acres, not a parcel-by-parcel determination.
- The percentage above is calculated by dividing the number of acres being converted by the average farm unit size in that county. For example, if the average farm size of Buena Vista county is 395 acres and the project in question is converting 490 acres from farmland, you would calculate 395/490 which equals roughly 80 percent. In this case, assign six (6) points.
- In the situation that less than 50% of the average farm size is being converted, the score would be zero (0). For example, if the total acres of the project to be converted from farmland are 100 acres and the average farm unit size is 395 acres, 100 acres is <50% of the average farm unit size. A score of zero is assigned accordingly.

Part VI, Question #6: Creation of Nonfarmable Farmland: This question is used to determine the acres that are no longer able to be farmed due to the proposed conversion. Some of examples of how a project may create nonfarmable land could be: due to conversion, a portion of the farmland is inaccessible, if the remaining portion of farmland in that area is too small to practically farm, the project has created severe soil disturbances (example would be the use of fill over a larger area), or if the project somehow created a likely flood area.

The point value will be based on an estimate using aerial maps and other known information of the project area.

Percentage	>25	25	20	15	10	5	<5
Point Value	25	24	18.25	12.5	6.75	1	0

The percentage is calculated by dividing the amount of remaining farmland that is nonfarmable by the amount of farmland that is converted by the project. For example, if as a result of the project, 1 acre is left nonfarmable and 5 acres are converted, the percentage is 20 and 18.25 points are assigned.

Part VI, Question #7: Availability of Farm Support Services: This factor is used to assess whether there are adequate support facilities, activities, and industry to keep the farming business in business. The support services to be considered include: farm suppliers, equipment dealers, processing and storage facilities, and farmer's markets. If either access or the support services will be affected, this needs to be considered in assigning points. If there will be no changes to services, assign 0 (zero) points. Use the following scale to best score these points:

- All required services are available = 5 points
- Some required services are available = 4 to 1 points
- No required services are available = 0 points

Part VI, Question #8: On-Farm Investments: This will assign a point value according to the amount of substantial and well-maintained on-farm investments on the project site. On-farm investments to consider are barns and storage buildings, known fruit trees, waterway and known irrigation or drainage ways. Count only on-farm investments that are actually on the project site.

The points assigned will be a subjective. This question will assign a point value largely by an estimate based on aerial maps. Use the following scale:

- High amount of on-farm investments = 20 points
- Moderate amount of on-farm investments = 19 to 1 points
- No on-farm investments = 0 points

Part VI, Question #9: Effects of Conversion on Farm Support Services: The intent of this question is to determine whether there are other agriculturally related activities, business or jobs dependent upon the work of the pre-converted site in order for the others to remain in production. The more businesses and farming activities that rely upon the land the more protection it should receive from conversion.

A quantifiable method of determining the effects to farm support services are as follows:

- Go to the USDA's Census of Agriculture Iowa tables for Number of Farms, Land in Farms, and Average Farm Size, Iowa by County, 2012. Once this table is updated, utilize the more recent data to make this determination.
- Find the total number of acres for the county project lies within. For example, in 2009 Tama County had 431,500 total acres in farmland.
- Calculate the percentage of land to be converted versus the total number of acres in the county. For example, if 75 acres are being converted in Tama County, divide 73/431,500=1.69x100=0.0169%. In this example, less than one percent of the total farmable acres in Tama County will be converted and it is not likely to create a significant reduction on local farm support services.

Use the following scale:

- Substantial reduction = 25 points
- Some reduction = 24 to 1 points
- No significant reduction = 0 points

Part VI, Question #10: Compatibility with Existing Agricultural Use: This question attempts to determine whether conversion of the proposed agricultural site will eventually cause the conversion of neighboring farmland as a result of incompatibility of use of the first with the latter. The more incompatible the proposed conversion is with agriculture, the more protection the site should receive from conversion.

Examples of projects that may be incompatible with agricultural use are interchanges, new interstate or roads where there were none prior to the conversion, and other type of projects that may promote economic development where there none prior. Examples of projects that may be compatible with agricultural use are those which do not promote further development such as rest areas, bridge replacements, additional turn lanes, etc.

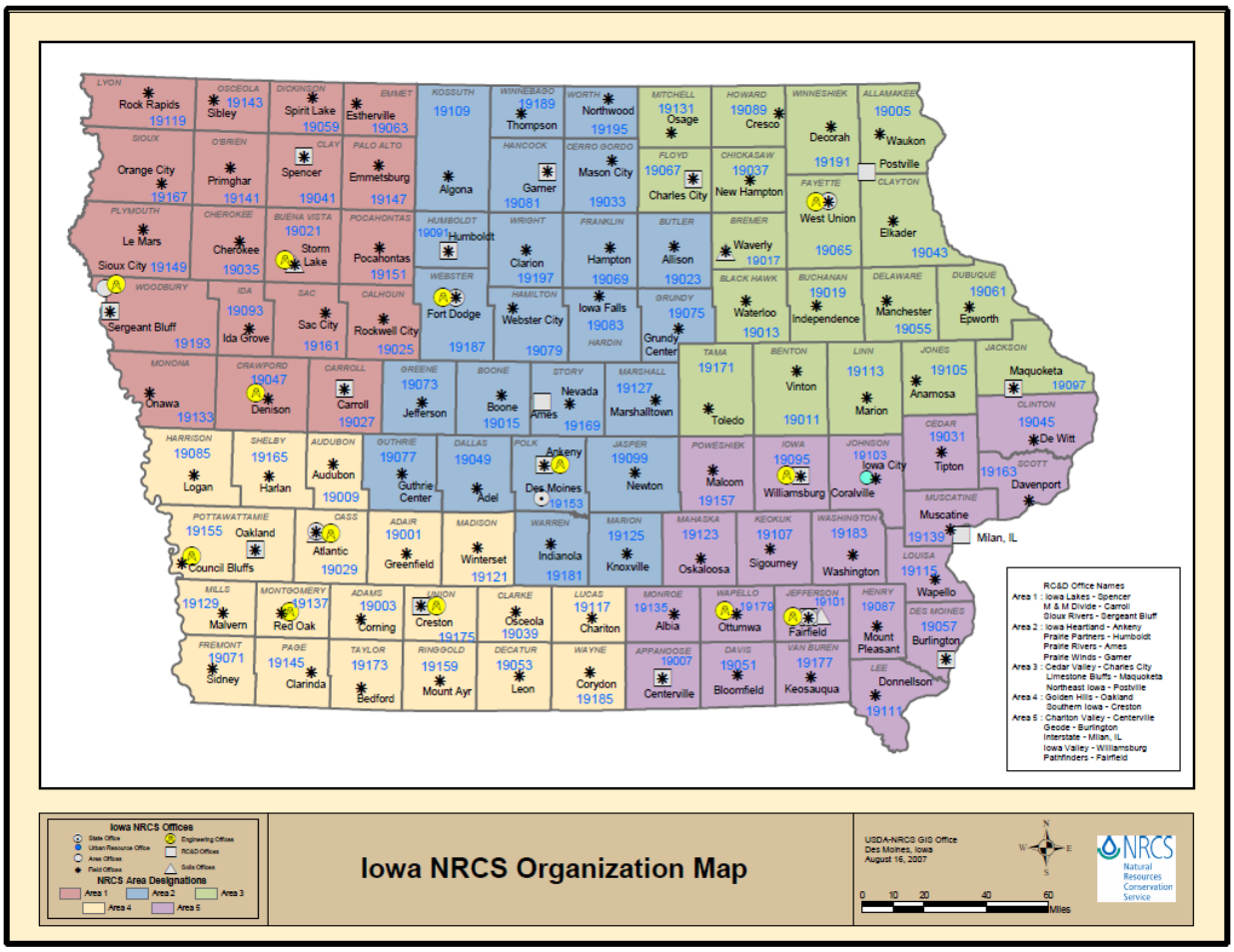
The point values assigned to the question with be subjective and will vary from project to project. Use the available known project information to assign the most accurate point value. Use the following scale:

- Incompatible with existing agricultural use of surrounding farmland = 10 points
- Tolerable to existing agricultural use of surrounding farmland = 9 to 1 points
- Fully compatible with existing agricultural use of surrounding farmland = 0 points

Upon Completion of the Farmland Conversion Form:

- Once Form NRCS-CPA-106 has been completed, add together the score from Part VI Site Assessment Criteria.
- If the total site assessment points are less than 60, no further action is required. The FPPA process is complete.
- If the total site assessment points are greater than 60, a copy of Form NRCS-CPA-106, a project location map, and soil maps in shape file format (GIS staff will prepare) must be emailed to the NRCS field office in the county where the project is located. The field office contacts are:

    - Areas 1, 3, and 4: Rick Bednarek (Rick.Bednarek@ia.usda.gov) 515-323-2238
    - Area 2: Patrick Chase (Patrick.Chase@ia.usda.gov) 515-573-4351
    - Area 5: Jason Steele (Jason.Steele@ia.usda.gov) 641-472-8411



- The NRCS office has 30 days to respond to requests for the completion of Form #NRCS-CPA-106. If the NRCS office does not respond within 30 days, and further delay would interfere with construction activities, the project may proceed without any additional consideration for farmland impacts.
- Upon completion of Parts II, IV, and V by the NRCS field office, there will be a final total point value calculated in Part VII “Total Points” section.
- If the points totaled are less than 160, the FPPA process is complete. No further action is required.
- If any of the alternatives have a total score of 160 points or more, further consideration should be given regarding the need for conversion of this farmland. This may include opting for one alternative over another that would require less conversion impacts.
- If the total score is 160 points or more, impacted farmlands should be given a higher level of consideration for protection which could include mitigation. The need for mitigation would be decided in consultation with the NRCS office. Mitigation could include:
    - Use of land that is not farmland
    - Identifying alternative locations that would convert fewer acres of farmland or use other farmland of lower relative value
    - Re-examination of any special siting requirements for the project.
- Once the mitigation process has been completed, the FPPA process is complete and no further action is required.